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*Thoughts after
Bournemouth*

**Conference
Changes
that are
Needed**

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THOUGHTS AFTER BOURNEMOUTH

The Annual Party Conference, 1946, has completed its discussions and takes its place with the 45 that preceded it. There have been Party Conferences in which the drama of Party life has struck the imagination with greater force, but none has reviewed and confirmed such a massive programme of legislative and other activity.

It is clearly evident, as the Chairman himself remarked to the Conference, that changes in conference arrangements are due. The possession of power by a Labour Government backed by a majority in the House of Commons, forces the movement to consider the arrangement of an agenda that, whilst giving the rank and file a full opportunity for discussion, will ensure priorities both in the choice of subject and it may well be, the choice of speakers.

Changes Due

No Party which has reached the position now occupied by the Labour Party, can safely contemplate the compilation of an agenda of business based on resolutions and amendments numbering more than 500 and reaching the table from all points of the compass.

Apart altogether from the diversity of issue raised, it must be appreciated that the length of time occupied in constituting the agenda renders many of the resolutions completely out of date by the time discussions begin.

For some years to come the Annual Party Conference must take on the form of an institution receiving reports

so that the rank and file can be brought into touch with the operations of Government. This purpose can be achieved either on the basis of written reports or on statements made to the Conference by Ministers in which inevitably those who speak from the floor, because of their numbers, will have less time at their disposal individually than that given to the Ministers.

This may prove irksome to young and enthusiastic delegates anxious to make their own impact on the Conference, but such must reflect that for the time being the Conference has ceased to be a sounding board for propaganda, and has become a business assembly with hard facts in front of it.

Foreign Affairs Debate

As an instance of the unsatisfactory conditions in which the Party has been led by the continuation of the old forms of business, one has only to refer to the Debate on Foreign Affairs. There emerged from the Conference Arrangements' Committee a number of composite resolutions based on the numerous resolutions sent in for the agenda. Under the procedure adopted, each of the composite resolutions was moved and seconded in procession, and in speeches more or less critical of the Government's position, and in the time given to delegates not involved in the resolutions, most of the speakers chosen followed in a similar strain.

No one would gather as the time

passed that the overwhelming view in the Conference was in favour of the Government's position as was later disclosed in the voting, and enlightenment did not come even during the speech of Mr. Bevin, because instead of laying before the Conference a considered review of the international situation, which the majority could applaud, he was impelled by the procedure followed to meet the criticism that had been raised.

How much different it would have been if Mr. Bevin had given a full account of his stewardship to the Conference in the beginning, and what a different impression would have been created both in the minds of those present and to the millions of readers of press reports.

Organising the Agenda

The agenda of the future must be organised so as to bring the essential points into discussion, and to provide opportunity for men and women of

authority as well as the rank and file to take part in the discussions. Perhaps under such an agenda, representatives of the Trade Union Movement might be encouraged to take their full part. No one can underestimate the importance of Trade Unions in the future political life of our country, and their representatives ought to be encouraged to express the views of their members when great decisions are to be made.

It is obvious too that the report of the Parliamentary Party ought to be given greater prominence in Conference discussions. That Party occupies a dominant position in the life of the country and its considered judgment should be placed at the disposal of delegates through representatives having authority within it.

It is to be hoped during the coming year that the National Executive Committee will be able to draft a report on these subjects for consideration at the next Conference.

UNION CONFERENCE

By R. H. LEY

Agents' Conditions to be Reviewed

One hundred and four members attended the Annual Conference of the National Union of Labour Organisers and Election Agents, held at the Labour Hall, Bournemouth, on Sunday, June 9th, 1946. Councillor F. T. Watson, J.P. (Leicester), presided, and was supported by the Executive Committee, Messrs. W. Jacob, J. G. Davies, J.P., Coun. Dan Dawson, Mr. Ben Wilson, Len Williams and Coun. R. H. Ley (Secretary) and Mr. G. R. Shepherd (National Agent). Apologies were received from the President, Mr. R. Montford, J.P., Mr. Claude Denscombe and Mr. Herbert Drinkwater.

The Chairman welcomed the delegates and congratulated the members on the results they had achieved at the elections and outlined the policy which the Union should take in its future development. The annual report, which received the unanimous approval of the members, showed an increase of 71 members during the year and up to the time of the conference. It recorded the passing of Mr. J. Aitken, Mr. S. Nicholson, Mr. E. H. Parker and Mr. W. Onley.

Tributes were paid to old retiring members, special mention being made of the retirement of Mr. W. H. Jacob, who had been chairman of the Union for three years and chairman of the London district on three occasions.

Bigger Balance

The finances of the Union showed a bigger balance in hand than for some years.

The report of the Adjustments Board revealed that the greatest achievement of the Union for a number of years was the increase of the basic salary by £90 per annum.

The *Labour Organiser* received an expression of approval for the excellent standard it had maintained.

The Union placed on record its thanks for assistance rendered to it by Mr. G. R. Shepherd, who is retiring from his position as National Agent in August. G.R. was elected chairman of the Union at its first Annual Conference held at Kingsley Hall, Bristol, in January, 1916, and although he had been exalted to the highest position on the Agency staff, he had never forgotten the Union which he helped to

bring into being. The Union will arrange a function at the next Annual Conference, at which George Shepherd will be the chief guest.

Organisation and Finance

There were a number of resolutions on the agenda dealing with organisation and finances of the Party and its relation to Agencies. These were withdrawn in favour of a composite resolution submitted by the Executive Committee: "That this Conference authorises the Union E.C. to review the whole question of the employment of Agents and instructs it to formulate its policy thereon. Such review should include (a) The present unsatisfactory and insecure circumstances of employment; (b) Proposals for a new Charter for a guaranteed salary and conditions of employment; (c) Qualifications for membership of the Union; (d) Methods of negotiation and consultation with the National E.C., including a review of the operation of the Adjustments Board; (e) The provision of adequate finance for National and Constituency Party needs."

A resolution in the name of the

London District asking for the production of a purely Union journal was defeated.

New Office-Bearers

Lancashire and Cheshire District requested the Trustees of the Agents' Superannuation Society to ask for a review of the provisions of the scheme. This was agreed to.

The Midland District asked that their District be divided to make two Districts—East and West Districts. The E.C. stated that this matter would receive their consideration with a view to setting up, where membership warranted it, Districts in line with Regional areas defined by the Party.

Election of officers: President, Mr. R. Montford, J.P.; Secretary, Mr. R. Stanton; Auditors, Mr. Clem Jones and Ald. C. W. Laker, J.P.

The Chairman, in speaking to a vote of thanks to the retiring Secretary, said it had been a difficult year with the general and municipal elections and desired to express the Executive Committee's thanks to the Secretary for the work he had put in during a difficult period and when no one would take the work on.

Agent Should Be Pivot of Party

By Councillor F. T. WATSON, J.P., Harborough Division

The Chairman's Address to the Annual Conference of the National Union of Labour Organisers and Election Agents, at Bournemouth, 9th June, 1946.

This Conference is the most unique in our history and a little time spent in retrospect would be justified. Twelve months ago, at our last Conference, we discussed preparations for the Election about to be forced upon us and with a good deal of scepticism wondered if the history of former after war elections would be repeated.

We returned to our constituencies full of hope and determination and

with a feeling somehow that the pendulum might swing our way. Though by no means perfect, our organisations had been maintained through the difficult years and we had a quiet confidence that they would stand the test. We had in the field many candidates of varying degrees in "age, ability, and aptitude," and we knew they would play their part well. None of us can deny that personality does have its importance in a contested election.

But I think we are entitled as Agents to take a good deal of credit to ourselves for the part we took in the organisation of victory, and this credit

has been generously afforded to us by the other partners.

The New Agents

Many new agencies were created and I should like to take this opportunity of welcoming those who have stayed on and are now in membership with us. I am sure they will by now have realised the importance of their position and the responsibility of the office they hold. To many people the agent has been looked upon as a glorified office boy capable only of obeying instructions and taking orders.

In point of fact the agent should be the pivot on which the Party leans, capable of advising and guiding at all times. The agent must be a model of tact, tolerance, and patience, and a little but not too much self-effacement. Unless possessing some qualities of leadership no agent will command the respect and confidence necessary to the complete fulfilment which the office requires.

Conditions of Service

It is therefore essential that in order that the right type might be attracted there should be security of employment and satisfactory conditions of service. The salary should be in keeping with the responsibility and comparable with similar professions.

The centre of administration should also be chosen with greater care and in this respect we have tended to be sadly lacking in dignity.

With some exceptions the Agent's office has been the back room of some dingy offices, on the top floor of some rickety stairs, an insecure table for a desk and one or two old uncomfortable chairs, a typewriter loaned by someone because it was no longer usable, and a few other makeshift accessories.

This might have been necessary in the days when we were a struggling propagandist Party, but is now totally unworthy of a great Political Party. It is necessary to make the right impression upon those who call to see us and in these days they are representative of all classes. This Conference will doubtless decide that the time has arrived when the whole question of the status and standing of the Agency service should be reviewed with the object of enhancing its value and usefulness to the Party as a whole.

New Methods of Finance

It will be necessary to overcome the tendency to take our politics too cheaply and new methods of national and local finance might be required. Stability and security are essential if our organisation is to be maintained at the high level necessary to consolidate our position. We recognise the co-operation and help always afforded by the Organisation Department at Transport House and our admiration has mounted as the result of the lead we received in the summer of last year.

With the pending retirement of George Shepherd we feel we are losing a real friend, and one in whom we have always had the utmost confidence. I confess that his austere countenance was at times somewhat terrifying, but that feeling disappeared as one got to know him more. It is hoped that he will be able to be with us at the next Conference as our guest at some function of a social atmosphere.

The year has seen a further development of the Regional offices of the Party and some of us still view them with "benevolent suspicion." For my own part I dislike intensely the operation of Regional Government in any form, and this is not entirely due to the regionalisation which we suffered through the war years.

It cannot be denied that it tends to duplication, waste of effort, time and money, and one sometimes wonders what can be set off against these disabilities.

Finally, as Agents, I think we must thank the Government and our Members of Parliament for the manner in which they have risen to the task set them. They have more than justified the confidence reposed in them and we remember that it is according to the manner in which they fulfil their part that our task will be when the election comes again.

I should like to pay my thanks to the General Secretary and my colleagues on the E.C. They have a difficult task to perform, but at all times give of their best in the consideration of the problems many and varied which affect our Union.

Selecting By-Election Candidates

By GEORGE R. SHEPHERD, National Agent

The procedure followed in the selection of candidates for Parliamentary by-elections has not been dealt with in the "Labour Organiser" for many years. It may be well, therefore, now that by-elections are being resumed with all Parties participating therein, to say something on the matter once more. It will, I think, be generally agreed that the by-elections of the next few years will have an important bearing on the fortunes of political parties at the next General Election.

To begin with we print hereunder the rule which applies. It will be found in all rule books applying to all forms of constituency:—

If a Parliamentary by-election occurs in the ——— Constituency the procedure laid down in Section 3 of this Clause shall be suspended and the National Executive Committee shall co-operate with the Executive Committee of this Party in the nomination of a candidate. The National Executive Committee may, if it deems it necessary in the interests of the Labour Party, advise the Executive Committee of this Party to select a nomination it may submit to it. The National Executive Committee may also give advice and guidance on any special issue to be raised or in the conduct of the campaign during the by-election.

Special Rule

It will be noted that the rule is special for by-elections and that it suspends the normal procedure followed in the selection of Parliamentary candidates for a General Election. The need of a special rule is, of course, determined by the varying circumstances which attend by-elections governed as they frequently are by the time factor, and the control exercised over that factor by a gentleman's agreement between Members of Parliament that the writ for a by-election contest shall only be moved by the Party holding the seat at the time of the vacancy occurring.

Quite frequently in the past, by-elections have been fought at very short notice indeed, and candidates have had to be chosen at once to meet the occasion.

The selection of a Parliamentary candidate in a by-election is, under the rule, a matter to be decided by the National Executive Committee, and the Executive Committee of a Party acting for both national and local interests.

This procedure is a reminder that By-elections are not local contests to be fought without reference to the Party as a whole. Indeed, By-elections may even be of greater national than of local importance, especially in times when Parliamentary controversies are raging at their height.

In periods of emergency the procedure of selection would most certainly be carried out by the two committees, but the National Executive Committee has been agreeable, where time is not the essence of the problem, to a modified form of the usual or normal procedure being undertaken.

That is to say, affiliated and Party organisations are given an opportunity of making nominations and the selection of the candidate is carried out by the General Committee of the Divisional Labour Party. This process is actually being carried out at this moment, in Pontypool, Bexley and North Battersea. It was also carried out in the Ogmere by-election just concluded.

N.E.C.'s Authority

The National Executive Committee may, if it deem it necessary in the interests of the Labour Party, advise the Executive Committee of a Constituency Party to select a nominee it may submit to it. Within that provision a good deal of authority is vested in the National Executive Committee, but that body exercises its authority sparingly and with discretion.

In exercising its authority the Executive Committee asks the Constituency Labour Party to invite the proposed candidate to a meeting to explain his position. If the Constituency Party reaches a conclusion that the candidate meets its local requirements, the candidate is selected without considering the claims of any other person or organisation.

(Continued on page 8)

How Redistribution Is Working Out

The Boundary Commission for England and Wales has now started dealing directly on constituencies. The Scottish Commission has been at work for some time on a large number of divisions.

Officials of constituency parties should keep a watch on their local press for Notices issued by the Commission in relation to their constituencies. So far, Notices have appeared in England in relation to the Isle of Wight, the Isle of Ely, Cambridgeshire, Huntingdon and Westmorland.

The procedure is that provided by Part III of the First Schedule of the House of Commons (Redistribution of Seats) Act, 1944. Notices are issued in the local press, giving particulars of the proposals and that recommendations and a map can be inspected at some specified place, usually the Council Offices, and an intimation is made that:

Representations with regard to the proposed recommendations may be made to the Commission within one month of the date of publication of the notice, and should be addressed to the Secretary of the Boundary Commission at a stated address.

The Commission may, in certain circumstances, hold a subsequent local inquiry.

In making any representations, officials should avoid writing in terms of protest or mere objection and should frame their representations on facts and circumstances and offer alternative proposals in a constructive way.

The electoral quota based on the October 1945 Register is theoretically about 54,000, with approximate toleration limits of 67,000 and 40,500, but there is a certain elasticity about the figures, dependent on the slight latitude as to the number of total constituencies, and the discretionary powers given to the Commissions in Rule 6 of the Third Schedule—in regard to special geographical consideration of size, shape and accessibility of a constituency, and by Rule 5 by the words—"so far as is practicable" in respect of boundaries of local areas.

The reviews which parties have previously made will, in general, be appropriate and useful for reference in giving consideration to the proposals of the Commissions, though it must be noted that the toleration limits of 25 per cent. above or below the quota are tighter than was originally anticipated.

"The Labour Organiser" for November, 1945, contains on page 15 the Third Schedule from the Redistribution of Seats Act, 1944, setting out the rules for distribution of seats.

The House of Commons (Redistribution of Seats) Act, 1944, is published at 3d. net, and can be obtained from H.M. Stationery Office, York House, Kingsway, London, W.C.2; 39, King Street, Manchester, 1; St. Andrews Crescent, Cardiff; or 13a, Castle Street, Edinburgh, 2.

(Continued from page 7)

Executive power is, however, circumscribed even in this case because it is inconceivable that the National Executive Committee would continue to press its recommendation in the event of the Constituency Labour Party seriously objecting to accept the advice tendered.

Procedure Works Well

In normal cases consultations are held on behalf of the National Executive Committee with the Executive Committee of a Constituency Labour Party in the first instance. Names appearing on the available and possible lists issued by the National Executive Committee are scrutinised and invitations are addressed to such as meet with favour from the Divisional Executive.

On the whole, the procedure has worked remarkably well, and no serious trouble has arisen during my term of office as National Agent. The National Executive Committee and its officers will not, I feel sure, be accused of having exercised undue influence no matter what the circumstances may have been.

THEIR PUBLICITY IS FREE

Our Labour Paper Pays Its Way

By BEN WILSON, Secretary and Agent, Preston T.C. and L.P.

Running a local Paper at a loss has been the lot of many Parties. But this need not be the case if sufficient advertising revenue is secured, as this "success story" of the "Preston Labour News" shows. Mr. Wilson will be glad to supply further technical details to local parties on request.

A number of Constituency Parties, not having the capital to launch a daily paper, have become the proprietors of weekly or monthly journals. Some are sold, others are distributed free.

The "Preston Labour News" is one of the journals distributed free. The advantage of free distribution is that it secures a much wider circulation than a journal which has to be sold.

Secret of Success

It is, after all, easier to give things away than to sell them, even if all those who receive a paper free do not read it. And it is circulation that interests advertisers.

"Preston Labour News" is an eight page monthly journal, first published in 1936, and coming under the control of the Party in 1937. The secret of its success is a good advertising manager, offering space at rates, which, with a reasonable proportion of advertising space to newsprint, shows a margin over cost of printing and paper to cover other costs.

It had a circulation before the war of 12,000 copies, cut under paper control to 9,000 copies, and this number has been issued month by month for the past nine years.

At election periods circulation has been increased to 20,000 or 22,000 copies, and publicity for the election gained by delaying the issue of the month prior to the election; publishing in the middle of the month in the month of campaign; and publishing the following month's issue before the end of the month. In the November elections this meant 60,000 copies of the "Labour News."

Income Still Rising

When the matter of finance was first discussed between the Executive Com-

mittee and the Advertising Manager, the latter estimated that he could secure an advertising revenue of £600 a year, charging 6/- per column inch for less than 12in., and rebates for over 12in. for 3, 6, or 12 consecutive insertions. The commission paid to the Advertising Manager is 25 per cent., and a further 5 per cent. on collection of accounts.

The original figures have altered as a consequence of rising costs, and our present rates are 6s. per column inch for all insertions except the front page, which is 10s. per column inch. Despite the war, which might have adversely affected advertising revenue, income from advertisements has steadily increased from £546 in 1940 to £885 in 1945. It is still rising.

To maintain advertisements it is important that circulation is effective, and in Preston the responsibility is put on the Ward Committees. It has been argued occasionally that distributors should be paid, but revenue is not sufficient for the purpose.

Profit Each Year

It has been held, moreover, that a Ward which cannot summon up sufficient enthusiasm to distribute literature which it obtains free does not deserve encouragement. It is, however, the first argument which is decisive, and to pay for distribution would seem to necessitate either a subsidy from the Party, or a limitation of the circulation by selling it.

Preston has been able to show a surplus in its balance sheets for several years, but this is due to the fact that no charge has been made for editorial or managerial services, a factor which would have to be taken into account in many constituencies.

Given the same measure of success in obtaining advertisements as in Preston payment could be made to an Advertising Manager, and for Editorial and managerial services, and if a Party can get a circulation of four pages of Party news and propaganda month after month and year after year, it should be well satisfied if income and expenditure balance.

The Aims of the Agents' Union

A PAPER READ THIRTY YEARS AGO

Thirty years ago, on Tuesday, January 25th, 1916, to be precise, a meeting convened by the Lancashire and Cheshire Agents, who had their own Association, took place in the Kingsley Hall, Bristol, to establish what is now the National Union of Labour Organisers and Election Agents.

Mr. Egerton P. Wake, then Agent at Barrow-in-Furness, and at a later date the National Agent of the Party, gave the Presidential Address from the Chair. He was then followed by Mr. G. R. Shepherd, then Agent at Blackburn and later to succeed Mr. Wake as National Agent, who read a specially prepared paper written at the request of his colleagues, to form the basis of discussion.

It is perhaps fitting that the following extracts from Mr. Shepherd's paper which laid down so clearly the essential principles for agency work should be given renewed publicity on the thirtieth anniversary of the union and on the occasion of the forthcoming retiral of Mr. Shepherd, who is to be one of the new Labour Peers.

"THE AIMS AND OBJECTS OF THE ASSOCIATION OF LABOUR REGISTRATION AND ELECTION AGENTS."

The first object, and the only ultimate object of our proposed association, is "The Advancement of the Labour Cause." This is no mere platitude. It is the sincere expression of men who, unlike other political agents, belong to the class they seek to serve.

"The Labour Cause is something different from the Conservative Cause or the Liberal Cause.

"When we speak of the Labour Cause, we mean the organisation of the nation's workers, whereby they can give political expression to their needs and desires; and, above all, the education of that class in those principles which will lead to a transformation in their attitude to the State, and, consequently, of the State towards them.

Labour's Aims

"The Labour Cause differs from the others I have mentioned in that it strives to serve the worker in a dual capacity. It desires to help him in his industrial undertaking as well as in his position as a citizen. And, whilst we to-day are more interested in the political side of the movement, this dualism pre-determines an organisation which combines the Trade Unions with Socialist organisations like the Independent Labour Party.

"Our first object is, therefore, clear. It is to build up an organisation in the constituencies based on the various working-class societies, governed by their delegates; and at the same time to gather together the liveliest spirits and weave them into a fighting

political machine. As an association we are committed to this method by the very nature of the principles for which we strive and the kind of material with which we have to deal . . .

"It may be said that only fully-qualified agents should be appointed to constituencies. But it has to be recognised that ours is a new Party, and that unless we take the agents from some other political organisation, which is unthinkable, few agents who are appointed can possess all the qualifications for these important positions. A Labour agent has got to be something more than a Liberal agent or a Tory agent. He has, from the nature of the case, to act as a leader in most constituencies, and unless he possesses a clear understanding of the movement he seeks to serve, though he had all the other virtues that an agent can have, he would be of very little use in the Labour Party.

Forming the Association

"It is the realisation of these circumstances which has led a few of us in Lancashire to take the steps to form an association, and which we hope will be placed upon a national basis to-day. It is not proper, in our view, to make the profession of an election agent a closed calling, for we recognise that the Party is growing rapidly, and that every year will add to the number of men who will become agents to constituencies. Our sole desire is to improve ourselves for the work we have to do, and to make it easier for the newcomers to acquire knowledge than it has been for those who have preceded them.

"The proposed association would not be of great use if it were left at that; for we could not meet, under those circumstances, more than once a year. To be of real use agents must be in a position to meet frequently, and we therefore suggest in our draft rules that the country should be divided into districts, and that each district should have a constitution and officials of its own, and arrange for its own business. By this means agents can meet often and discuss amongst themselves their needs and difficulties. Perhaps as we become established an interchange of speakers might take place, so that fresh ideas may circulate throughout the country.

"Every agent works upon one line, which may be better than that used by others. The association, by enabling us to meet, will bring us within measurable distance of obtaining a system of organisation which, in practice, has been found to be the most effective. By this I do not mean that we should seek to stereotype the electoral machine for the whole country: for constituencies are like people—they have their prejudices and caprices. What we might do, however, is to decide upon the best methods, and then each agent can adapt them with the necessary modifications, to his own constituency.

Status of Agent

"The primary object of our association is, as I have said, the advancement of the Labour Cause. But it should be said, that the question of the status of the agent must also receive its care. In its main purpose the association is not a Trade Union; for, unlike Trade Unions, its purpose is the same as the organisation by whom its members are employed. Still, Labour agents, if they have no particular grievances common to them all, are sometimes in a position the reverse of pleasant. Some agents are removed from active participation in the work of their committees—a position I wouldn't hold for a moment. Others are looked upon as the mere representatives of the parliamentary candidate. There have even been cases where local Parties have paid their agents so little that they have actually made a profit out of employing them. Two agents whom I know, in important constituencies represented by Labour Members, never

see the official correspondence, except through the courtesy of a voluntary secretary, and many never get the opportunity of attending a National Conference. Matters like these could be taken up, by our association, with the National E.C. with the object of securing a remedy.

Wide Membership

"The question as to who should be members of the association is, of course, open to discussion. Personally, I think that membership should be made as wide as possible, but with due regard to the purposes for which it is to be established. The draft rules cover the point rather well, for they provide for the full-time agent, and part-time agent, together with the political agents of the Independent Labour Party, and the Scottish Miners. Such agents are not fixed to a constituency, but they are called upon to act as election agents, and sometimes as registration agents. It is not contemplated that lawyers should be admitted to membership who merely act as agents when the actual contest is about to begin and then only as lawyers, and not as supporters of the movement. The position of lawyers who are supporters of the Labour Party and who are agents is somewhat different, and their cases could be dealt with under a special clause of the constitution.

"Briefly, the objects can be put as follows:—

- (1) The advancement of the Labour Cause.
- (2) The teaching in the Theory and Practice of Registration.
- (3) The teaching in the Theory and Practice of Organisation.
- (4) The teaching in the Theory and Practice of Elections.
- (5) Consultations with the National E.C. on matters relating to the movement, and politics generally.
- (6) Care for the status of the Labour agent."

The motion to form an association was moved by the late Fred Plant of Stockport, and the late W. Barefoot of Woolwich and carried unanimously.

The Officers

The Officers appointed were: President, Mr. E. P. Wake; Chairman, Mr. G. R. Shepherd; Vice-Chairman, Mr. W. Harris (South Wales); Treasurer,

Mr. J. T. Abbott (I.L.P.) and Secretary, Mr. A. James of Miles Platting.

At the afternoon session a discussion took place between the newly-constituted association and representatives of the National Executive Committee consisting of Mr. J. R. Clynes, M.P., Mr. Harry Twist, later to become M.P. for Wigan, and Mr. A. G. Cameron, later to become M.P. for Widnes.

Discussions covered three items (1) that the Party be asked to make it a condition of the granting of a subsidy to a Local Labour Party that the agent should be sent to the Annual

Conference. (2) That a Conference of Agents should be called together by the National Executive Committee to discuss registration prior to the introduction of a new Registration Bill. (3) That the attention of the Executive be called to the position of Agents who are situated like the Manchester Agents.

Forty-two Agents were present and joined the Association at once, and it is a matter of interest to note that Mr. James Whittaker, Agent at West Wolverhampton, called attention to the need of Superannuation and Benevolent Funds.

PROFILE OF GEORGE SHEPHERD

By JACK CUTTER

The Chief

There is a corner of England which is so like the Netherlands that it is called Holland. There is the same rich soil; there are windmills in silhouette against the wide horizons, and in the springtimes of Peace many of the fields are precise squares blazing with the almost violent colours of flowering bulbs, like a gigantic patchwork quilt.

It was here that George Shepherd was born in the town of Spalding sixty-five years ago this August, and though he has long left his native shire, there is still a trace of the accent of South Lincolnshire in his talk, while the unhurried gait of the Marshman stays with him to this day.

And now G.R.S. is to retire after 45 years of active service in the Labour Movement. This news brings a jolt to those of us who have worked with him.

We knew that the time of parting would come, but now that the actual event draws near, we realise just what a wrench it will be when he clears the National Agent's desk for the last time, and his shrewd guidance, sound judgment and valued advice is no longer available to us.

Now In His Prime

The wrench will be the greater because his powers have increased with each passing year until he seems now at his peak and prime, apparently accomplishing increasing work with decreasing expenditure of effort and improving his notable facility for stating a case with the minimum of words and the maximum of well-marshalled facts backed by unassailable logic.

There has been no "declining years" stuff about G.R.S. On the contrary, he

has defied all the rules and has grown steadily with his responsibilities, keeping always a length ahead of them.

It was long, long ago, 27 years ago, as ordinary mortals calculate time and seven General Elections ago, according to a political organiser's method of reckoning, that the Labour Party appointed George Shepherd Assistant National Agent. He was then 37 years of age, and when young George joined Uncle Arthur and Egerton Wake at Eccleston Square, Philip Snowden lost a good Agent in Blackburn. A few years earlier Alec Wilkie, one of the first Scottish M.P.s, had a similar misfortune in Dundee, where George began his career as Party Agent in 1909. It was there that he had his first experience of Winston Churchill, who encountered for the first time the effect of a well-organised Labour election machine. Refusing to profit by his experience he had to learn the lesson all over again 36 years later in 1945 on a larger scale, but with the same director of the Labour machine.

G.R.S. entered the Movement via the Shop Assistants' Union (of which he is still a paid-up member) in his 20th year, and it will be no surprise to those who have enjoyed his apparently casual dropping of a thought-provoking phrase with a delayed action as an aside to an address on Party organisation, to learn that he was a successful propagandist in his early twenties and was an I.L.P. organiser in the Midlands before going to Dundee as Party Agent.

The Problem Years

After ten years as Assistant National Agent he was appointed National

Agent in 1929 at the beginning of the Labour Party's most problem-ridden period. The Party's path during the subsequent three years was strewn with political potholes. Departing leaders, electoral defeat and financial poverty strained every bolt in the Party's machine and would have wrecked it had its structure been unsound. But it held in every joint.

Not a single D.L.P. wavered, and through it all the unshaken confidence and steady solidity of George Shepherd in the driver's seat had little public notice at the time, but produced for him something which he valued more highly—the respect and admiration of his colleagues in the organising service of the Party.

Years later, when his singleness of purpose and ability in direction had produced electoral victory, there were few of these colleagues who did not give early thought to G.R.S. as the results came streaming in. Our sense of satisfaction with our individual results was increased by the thought that this was a fitting reward for our Chief, who had laid the foundations so securely and had accomplished with such emphatic success the aim he had so steadfastly pursued throughout his life.

When, after last year's election, the Tories held a series of inquests to probe the reasons for their electoral debacle, they produced many reasons to comfort themselves, few of which were correct. But the one which recognised that the Labour Party had never allowed its political machine to go rusty even while playing its full part in the war effort, was nearest to the truth. In their list of "Why we Lost" reasons they could do worse than give high priority to the fact that George Shepherd, the shrewdest political organiser of the 1945 election, was in charge of the Labour Party machine.

When, promptly at 5 p.m. one of these days very shortly, he reaches for his hat, umbrella and brief case and makes his unhurried way to the Westminster station of the District Railway for the last time in his capacity as National Agent, we shall miss his wise counsel, his steady loyalty to his colleagues and his sensible leadership. But I know that there will be new opportunities for the Movement to continue to benefit by his services. So it is "au revoir" to George, a good chief, a good counsellor, and a good friend, and it will be "hail" to George, an old comrade in new spheres.

ROUND THE LABOUR PRESS

Lewisham's Democrat Looks a Winner

One of the best of the new local Labour publications is *The Democrat*, the journal of the West Lewisham Party, which has just made its first appearance.

It is packed full of newsy, interesting material and its handy size should prove popular. The first issue contains a message from Arthur Skeffington, West Lewisham's M.P., in which he says: "To continue this Government successfully for a long period the public must know the magnitude of our problem and what we are doing. Very little of the National Press is favourable to us. Not only for the Movement, but for wise democratic processes, an informed public opinion is essential. I am sure that *The Democrat* will help us in Lewisham to create this body of informed citizens."

Among *The Democrat's* features are Ward News and Views, Women's and Youth Reports, Home Hints, and

a review of the Executive Committee's annual report.

Another bright idea is the inclusion, with the distribution of *The Democrat* of a "What's On" leaflet giving details of all Party and ward activities for the ensuing month. Here's a lead that might well be followed by other local Parties.

M.P.s Dieting Experiments

The *Dulwich Bulletin*, issued by the Dulwich Labour Party, is another first-rate effort, well-printed and neatly laid-out. The June issue contains a reasoned, well-argued statement of the Party's opposition to Communist affiliation, and an article by Major Vernon, M.P., giving details of his recent dieting experiments.

Labour Life, monthly magazine of the St. Marylebone Labour Party, maintains a high standard. The June issue has an interesting article by Tom Vernon, secretary of the Party, on the

Party's housing plans for the terraces in Regent's Park.

The Forward, monthly organ of the Aston D.L.P., received cabled congratulations on its first issue from Major Woodrow Wyatt, Aston M.P., who is now serving as Personal Assistant to Sir Stafford Cripps in India. It is a neat, handy-size eight-pager containing much informative material on local party activities. The Diary on future activities should again prove a very useful feature.

Congratulations, too, to the Brighton and Hove Party for their extremely useful and informative Labour Directory. This contains biographical notes of all Labour aldermen, councillors, ex-candidates, and J.P.s, with names and addresses of secretaries of all Trade Union, Co-operative and Labour organisations in the district. This is certainly one of the best local "Who's Who's" ever issued by any local party.

First issue of the Sunderland Labour *News Letter*, issued by Sunderland D.L.P., reports that the membership of the Party is increasing daily and that the target figure is now 4,000.

The *News Letter*, successor of the old *Wearsider*, contains congratulatory messages from local M.P.s, and articles on Education and the National Insurance Bill. Another useful feature is a Labour Diary.

The E.C. have plans for launching the *News Letter* on a more ambitious scale, but meantime it should receive every support from Labour people in the district.

Darlington's Women Candidates

A recent paragraph in these columns on the annual report of the Darlington Labour Party stated "that local prejudice against women councillors is being broken down and both Labour and anti-Labour women candidates did well."

This gives a wrong interpretation of the situation, as Mr. T. W. Foster, secretary of Darlington L.P., has kindly pointed out. The position is that there were six women candidates, four Labour and two anti-Labour, and in fact three Labour women candidates were returned.

So it is still pretty obvious that Darlington people have a healthy prejudice against women candidates with the wrong policy! It is good, however, to see that the Labour women candidates did so well.

New Regional Councils to be Set Up

The establishment of Regional Councils during the past few years has met with unqualified success. In all areas where they are in operation they have given a new corporate sense to both Trade Unions and Constituency Parties.

In reviewing the work of the Councils, and in full recognition of the part they played in the General Election of last year, the National Executive Committee, now that its own financial position is easier, has decided that Regional Councils shall be established in the Eastern Counties, the Home and Southern Counties and the South-Western Counties. Steps will be taken immediately in this work now that the Annual Party Conference is over.

During the war period the National Executive Committee divided the Midland Area into two new areas, and the North-Eastern and the North-Western Areas into three new areas, and Regional Councils have now been provided for them all, including the appointment of two District Organisers and two Women Organisers.

The National Executive Committee has also decided to appoint additional Organisers for Scotland, Lancashire and Cheshire and London, to supplement the activities of the District Organisers in those areas because for political and other reasons, they are indivisible. Mr. John Anson has been continued in the Scottish District and fresh appointments will be advertised shortly for Lancashire and Cheshire and London.

The National Executive Committee has now decided to increase the grants to the Regional Councils as from July 1st of this year.

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ELECTORAL REFORM GROUP

The Parliamentary Labour Party has appointed an Electoral Reform Group to keep in review electoral and registration matters and legislation.

The Chairman is Mr. Sidney Dye, M.P., and the members are: Mr. A. H. Alpass, M.P., Miss G. Colman, M.P., Mr. Haydn Davies, M.P., Mr. W. J. Irving, M.P., Mr. S. Lavers, M.P., Mr. C. A. G. Manning, M.P., Mr. R. W. G. Mackay, M.P., Mr. F. Noel-Baker, M.P., Mr. D. Pryde, M.P., Mr. T. Reid, M.P., Mr. D. J. Williams, M.P., Lord Henderson, Lord Rusholme.

A meeting was held at the House of Commons on May 10, at which the National Agent, Mr. G. R. Shepherd, and Mr. Harold Croft, were present.

Mr. Shepherd referred to the Home Office Departmental Committees on Electoral Registration and Electoral Reform, which will be issuing Reports shortly, and on which legislation will follow. He indicated the main lines of consideration of various problems which will arise for the Group to discuss.

Mr. Croft outlined a number of items on which local parties had expressed dissatisfaction and opinions.

A discussion followed, and thanks were expressed for the information as to the layout of problems for the Group's consideration, given by the National Agent.

The above gives an idea of the attractive appearance of a Two-Colour (red over black) Hanging Window Card designed by Tom Baxter, East Midlands Organiser, to boost the membership drive in his area.

The Card, which measures 12in. x 10in., and is just off the Press, looks like being a real winner.

Copies are available for other parties but orders must be sent off immediately. The cards are 6d. each or 5/- a dozen. Prices for quantities are 50 copies for £1 and 100 copies for 38/-.

Cash should be sent with orders to the East Midlands Regional Council of the Labour Party, 138, Mansfield Road, Nottingham.

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Membership Jumps in South Wales

By CLIFF PROTHERO, Secretary, South Wales Regional Council

The ninth Annual Conference of the South Wales Regional Council of Labour was a huge success. We were fortunate in having Professor Harold Laski and Mr. T. O'Brien, M.P., as Fraternal Delegates from the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party, and the General Council of the Trades Union Congress respectively.

In conveying fraternal greetings, both speakers dealt with the growth of this Regional Council and its influence in the political and Trade Union movement.

Mr. G. R. Shepherd, National Agent, who is always received with enthusiasm in South Wales, not only because of his interest in the Regional Council, but because of his sound advice which he imparts to the movement at all times. He did not disappoint us on this occasion but kept to form by giving an excellent address on Party Organisation.

Affiliated Membership

During the year affiliated membership had increased by 6,000, bringing it to a grand total of 249,000.

Individual Membership

During 1945, individual membership increased substantially and we are glad to report that records show an increase of no less than 9,042 within the Region during the year, which brings our individual membership up to a total of 24,201. This figure does not include North Wales, where we have a membership of 7,832. The increased membership included (a) men and women who came into our Party during the General Election, (b) men and women returning from H.M. Forces, and (c) those who joined our Party just prior to the Local Government Elections. The individual membership is still no indication of our real strength throughout the Region. We are, therefore, deter-

mined to continue our drive for new members.

May Day Broadcast

For the past two years we have had an arrangement with the B.B.C. for a nominee of this Regional Council to broadcast a talk over the Welsh Home Service on the subject "Labour Day and What It Means to the Workers." This year the B.B.C. agreed to broadcast a programme consisting of recordings of May Day Celebrations held in the Region. This is a new form of publicity and provides an opportunity for a vast unseen audience to hear the voice of prominent speakers.

Status of Regional Council

The Regional Council has passed through a difficult period and the fruits of its labour are now acknowledged by the whole of the Labour and Trade Union Movement throughout the Region. The Council wields a tremendous influence and this is due to the co-operation and assistance given by the Trade Union and Party Organisations. Even though the Council is not a policy-making body (for it must always be acknowledged that this is the function of the Annual Conference of the Labour Party) it must from time to time give a lead to the whole of our Movement throughout the Region, which results in initiating discussions on various subjects so that affiliated and Party Organisations shall play their full part in the great Labour Movement.

It is also more important than ever that the Council shall also be a clearing house of a two-way traffic system, whereby information, advice and guidance from the National Executive Committee shall be passed on to all sections of our Movement, and with equal importance we must keep the N.E.C. informed, not only of Party activities but of the problems with which we are confronted in South Wales.

West Midlands' Grand Conference

By HARRY WICKHAM, West Midlands Organiser

The West Midland Region held its fourth and most successful Annual Conference at Transport House, Birmingham, on Saturday and Sunday, May 11th and 12th. The Rt. Hon. Arthur Greenwood and Mr. G. R. Shepherd were the guests of the Region and their addresses were both informative and inspiring.

The visits of representatives of the National Executive Committee on these occasions is doing much to strengthen the work of the Council and give a unique opportunity for an exchange of views on matters of vital interest to the party. An attendance of delegates representing Trades Unions, Labour Parties, Advisory Councils and Federations, Members of Parliament and ex-officio members, was presided over by Ald. Humphreys, J.P.

The Executive Committee report covered a wide range of subjects and recorded much progress in all parts of the region. Affiliations from Trade Unions are steadily increasing and much work has been achieved by the Trades Union Sub-Committee in bringing together the Political and Industrial wings of the movement in both the constituencies and the Region.

Target of 60,000

The membership campaign sponsored by the Council resulted in an increase of 10,000 new members during 1945, and the conference unanimously adopted the recommendation of the executive committee for an all-out drive to reach a target of 60,000 members this year.

Target figures have been fixed for every constituency and the Regional Council is organising in every constituency a special campaign pamphlet for all local officers, membership collectors, canvassers, etc., and is awarding a Banner as a Regional Trophy to be held by the Constituency Party making the largest percentage increase of new members.

Local Government Plans

The campaign will close with a great Regional Demonstration to be held in Birmingham in October. Great interest was displayed in the

steps taken by the Regional Council to co-ordinate the work of Local Government representatives and in the organising of the Municipal and Local Elections. The Regional Office was able to report that over 200,000 copies of the County Council Election address prepared by the Council had been taken by Constituency and Local Parties.

An executive committee resolution, welcoming the formation of discussion groups and the development of day and week-end schools gave the lead to a first-class debate on education work.

Educational Centre

Residential and Week-end Schools are now a regular feature of the Council's activity, and demands were made for their extension to all parts of the Region and the new Executive Committee was instructed to prepare a scheme and proceed forthwith to raise a fund for the purchase of a permanent centre for residential educational activity. Broadcasting and the press were both before the conference in resolutions calling for the establishment of an evening newspaper covering the West Midlands and a demand for more political broadcasting. The Executive Committee have established a committee to endeavour to establish an evening newspaper, but the project is a very difficult one, both from the financial and practical angles.

Magisterial Appointments

One of the greatest achievements in the influence of the Council was revealed in a report presented on the work of a sub-committee dealing with magisterial appointments. Deputations to the Lord Chancellor, Lord-Lieutenants, and consultations with members of Parliament have resulted in a considerable number of new appointments and an increase of labour representation on local advisory committees.

The conference overwhelmingly carried a resolution giving to the Council full powers to review all nominations for appointment before being submitted to local advisory Committees or the Lord Chancellor.

Recent Election Cases

I

BERWICK-ON-TWEED MUNICIPAL ELECTION Election Declared Void

R.O. no power to disallow nomination paper for "Disqualification"

A petition was heard in the High Court, February 6th, 1946.

The Case. — Mr. James Adams, a schoolmaster and a Labour candidate for a casual vacancy election on December 13th, 1945, submitted four nomination papers. On each of the nomination papers the mayor endorsed the statement that having examined the papers he decided that the candidate had not been validly nominated; the ground being that it was apparent on the face of the paper that the candidate was disqualified for being elected or being a member of the council by virtue of Section 59 (2) of L.G.A. 1933.

Points from the Judgment.—Hallett, J., in his summing up, said "it appeared that this candidate was a specialist teacher employed by the county council, but on the face of the nomination papers there was nothing whatsoever to inform the mayor that he was so employed." He went on to point out that whether this candidate was employed under the direction of Managers, who could be regarded as being a committee or sub-committee of the county council, he had no materials on which to form an opinion. In these circumstances he asked how was it possible for the mayor to decide that on the face of the nomination papers this candidate was disqualified. Determination of that question would require a careful examination of the facts, and the law, and he was not deciding whether the candidate would or would not be held disqualified for being elected by a proper tribunal. The Judge went on to discuss the essential points of the case. He said that the mayor derives his powers from paragraph 5 of Part I of Schedule II of the Act, which provides that he shall examine the nomination papers. In his opinion those mere words at once raised a doubt whether the mayor is empowered to decide anything which is not revealed by examination of the nomination paper. What the mayor apparently thought he had the power to do was to decide not whether

the candidate had been nominated in accordance with the Schedule, but whether he was disqualified from being elected by reason of Section 59 (2) of the Act. In his opinion the Judge said the language of paragraph 5 (1) of the Schedule clearly indicates that the mayor is limited to an enquiry into the validity of the nomination, having regard to the provisions of the Schedule. The provision with regard to disqualification on which he relied is not in the Schedule at all, and it refers to disqualification not for being nominated but for being elected. This view appeared to be concerned by the subsequent provisions of paragraph 5 of Part I of the Schedule.

By paragraph 5 (2) if the decision of the mayor is favourable to the validity "his decision shall be final and shall not be questioned in any proceeding whatsoever."

The Judge went on to point out that if the mayor had authority to decide the question of the qualification the position would be that if he decided favourably in regard to qualification, although on an investigation it appeared that the candidate was palpably disqualified, then since the decision of the mayor would be final, the qualification of the candidate could not be questioned.

In conclusion he said that if the view taken by the mayor was right, his decision on the question of qualification would be final, although all that he is empowered to do is to decide whether candidates have been validly nominated in accordance with the Schedule.

The Judge declared the election void.

Note:

The following paragraph from the "Law relating to Local Elections" by Oscar F. Dowson and H. W. Wightwick, is of interest alongside the above case.

"The returning officer or mayor is to satisfy himself only of the validity of the nomination paper and not of the validity of the nomination as distinguished from the nomination paper, e.g. he cannot go into the question of the qualification of the candidate for election (see per Lords Watson and Herschell in *Pritchard v. Bangor Corporation* (1888) 13 A.C. at pp. 252, 257). A person may therefore be "validly

nominated" who is disqualified in fact, but whose disqualification is not apparent on the nomination paper and whose nomination has been sustained by the returning officer (*Hobbs v. Morey* (1904) 1 K.B. at p. 78). But a nomination paper which is, on the face of it, a mere abuse of the right of nomination or an obvious unreality, e.g. if it purports to nominate a deceased sovereign, should be rejected (*Harford v. Linskey* (1899) 1 Q.B. at p. 862; *Hobbs v. Morey*, supra).

II MOSS SIDE DIVISION OF MANCHESTER: GENERAL ELECTION 1945

Description of a Candidate on Nomination Paper altered by the Returning Officer.

Claim for Damages of £150, etc.

Action Dismissed, with costs.

Action heard at the Manchester Assizes on May 2nd, and 7th, 1946.

The Case.—Councillor A. E. Edwards, a candidate at the General Election,

who lost his deposit, had handed in 19 nomination papers on which he was described fully as the Hon. Secretary, Moss Side Tenants Protection Society. He remained at the Town Hall for an hour after handing in his papers and no-one said anything to him about the description. On the Friday after nomination he received a letter from the Returning Officer stating that his description had been altered because it was considered that the words "of the Moss Side Tenants Association were superfluous." He claimed that by the substitution of the one word "Secretary" in place of the full description he had lost support and forfeited his deposit. He argued also that the Ballot Act laid it down that any objection to nomination papers must be made at the time of the nomination.

The Defence.—A Returning Officer had a discretion so far as a description of a candidate was concerned. Under the Ballot Act the description of the candidate had to be in the opinion of the Returning Officer sufficient. The Returning Officer considered that the description of Secretary was sufficient. The alterations were made a few minutes after the receipt of the papers. Councillor Edwards had left the room and an effort was made to find him.

Points from the Judgment. — Mr. Justice Morris, in summing up, indicated that he was satisfied that the Town Clerk and the Returning Officer had honestly formed the opinion that the description was surplusage and no kind of advertisement of a candidate under disguise of his description should be permitted. The Judge did not think there had been any wilful act or omission, and he thought that the officials and the Returning Officer had complied with the rules for the reason that the nomination paper had been altered to keep it alive and valid. He went on to say that even if he had been satisfied there had been irregularities on the part of the Returning Officer or officials, he would be very far from satisfied that the plaintiff had suffered any real damage, and he was sure that the average elector made up his mind before he saw the ballot paper and recorded his vote.

The action was dismissed with costs against the plaintiff.

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